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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000124

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2020

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI KING PESSIMISTIC WITH BLAIR ON CHANCES FOR
PROGRESS ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE

REF: RIYADH 118

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Smith, reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) The British DCM provided Econcous with a readout of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's January 24 meeting with the King and FM Saud Al-Faisal. According to the DCM, Blair stressed the importance of restarting the negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Besides putting more pressure on Israel to live up to its promises, it would also help the international community put more pressure on Iran. The DCM reported the King was very pessimistic about the prospects for success, stating at one point that "there is no point" restarting talks if the Israelis "care more about the soul of a cat than the soul of a Palestinian." The King cited the ongoing spectacles of Palestinian women and children being cast out of their homes. The King also was quite animated in criticizing what he perceived as Israeli hypocrisy in being concerned about the fate of Gilad Shalit when dozens of Palestinians have suffered in recent actions. FM Al-Faisal was not quite as negative, but questioned whether Abbas was strong enough politically to resume negotiations.

¶2. (C) According to the DCM, Saud Al-Faisal made some positive comments about U.S. efforts to restart the negotiations, although he also complained that the U.S. position effectively gave the Israelis a veto on the issue of side letters. Saud Al-Faisal also was disappointed that he had not heard any reactions from Senator Mitchell, or the Egyptians, on their talks with the Israelis. Al-Faisal also thought that the U.S. did not have to wait for negotiations to resume to exert stronger pressure on Israel for flexibility on important issues, like East Jerusalem and the Jordan valley.

¶3. (C) The British DCM was struck by the extremely negative tone of the King's comments, which seemed much more stark than the most recent official UK discussions with senior Saudi officials. He speculated that there may have been some element of playing to a particular audience, and "Blair is known" for looking at events in a positive light. As such, the negative message may have been designed to send a clear signal.

SMITH